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WALK BETWEEN DAY AND NIGHT WITH NICOLAS PARTY

by Eric Clement



PHOTO GRAHAM HUGHES, THE CANADIAN PRESS
Nicolas Party in front of his Mauve Peaches mural

Get ready for a breath of comfort! Starting Saturday, you can take your mind off things by strolling among the soothing works of Nicolas Party at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA), with Pierre Lapointe's new opus in your ears. Presented until October 16, the exhibition *L'heure mauve*, by the New York artist of Swiss origin, enhanced by the musical atmosphere of the Quebec singer, is a pure delight.

In a lifetime, there are exhibitions that we feel will mark you forever. In recent years, there have been a few at the MMFA. That of Peter Doig, in 2014, Marc Chagall in colors and music, in 2017, or *Splendore a Venezia*, in 2013. *The mauve hour* is of this temper.

It took a year of work for the museum, its teams, the artist Nicolas Party and the singer Pierre Lapointe to concoct this museum event which is, in itself, "a work of art", as said on Monday Stéphane Aquin, director general of the MMFA and initiator of this exhibition.

L'Heure Mauve is a setting, a display of our relationship with nature, through the prism of art. With acrylics, sculptures, four mural works and pastels by Nicolas Party, grand master of Symbolist figuration. And works from the museum's collection that he has chosen and which dialogue with his work as with our reality of climate crisis and weakened environment.

The visit is an immersive journey to the sound of ballads by Pierre Lapointe (bring your cell phone and headphones!). A comforting and awake gentle walk. Because if Nicolas Party like Pierre Lapointe are not militants, their expressions touch in depth. And often where it hurts. For example, the landscapes in the paintings remind us of how humans conquered mountains and plains, exploiting their

resources without measure.

L'heure mauve is the title of a painting by Ozias Leduc, but also this moment between day and night. "What is in between things interests me," Nicolas Party tells us. What is called the liminal space. This transition between two elements, between two universes. Between the works of the museum and his own. Between the visual arts and music. Between man and woman, with his portraits and sculptures of androgynous characters.

The exhibition is made up of seven rooms, linked by neat architectural touches. Wide door or arch. In the first room, painted in dark green, the visit begins with two still lifes by Otto Marseus van Schrieck (flowers and animals) that Nicolas Party offered himself when he began to have the means! Oils from the 17th century combined with landscapes by Gustave Courbet and Nicolas Poussin and a pastel mural he made *in situ*. Trees with tangled branches. It feels like being in a forest. A chair by Frank Gehry, from the museum's collection, makes you want to sit down to contemplate the mural.

In the second room, in shades of burgundy red, magnificent pastels, rocks and trees, rub shoulders with an oil painting by Giacometti. In the third room, almond green, the *Grotte* mural – the completion of which *La Presse* had seen – is associated with the emblematic canvas *Portrait of the lawyer Hugo Simons*, by Otto Dix, and the pastel *Portrait with lawyer*, by Party, which is an inspiration. Up close, we appreciate the way Nicolas Party creates shadows with his pastel sticks. A breathtaking technique.

The fourth room, in dark blue, is splendid. With practically only trees and, in its center, deck chairs from the museum's collection, which "invite" to admire so much beauty. One notes in Party's paintings the borrowings made from the emaciated trees of Lawren Harris and Franklin Carmichael. And then, these little touches of red on the plant stems of his *Landscape*, 2021, an indication of sunlight in a snowy environment.

The fifth flesh-colored room is devoted to still lifes, with Party pots inspired by those of Giorgio Morandi. And then, another mural, *Mauve Peaches*, sensual with these fruits resembling small buttocks! We find this sensuality in the painting *Three Apples*, by Ozias Leduc, and another still life by Party: apples and pears lying on top of each other. But with Jacques Lisnard's painting, *Still Life with Shells and Coral*, we go from debauchery to consciousness when we learn that three of his shells are endangered species, warns Stéphane Aquin.

The lucidity continues in the sixth room, blood red in color, very dramatic with two canvases on the *Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* and *Red Forest*, a recent and surprising pastel by Nicolas Party, on the reality of increasingly devastating forest fires. A room on our arrogance and carelessness, as illustrated by Charles Meynier's *Milon de Croton*. When excessiveness causes the fall. Nicolas Party wanted to raise questions in the visitor. "I thought it was important to have strong and very direct accents in certain rooms to emphasize current themes," he says.

The last room, dark green, is a kind of place of contemplation or decompression with sculptures of Party, but nothing on the walls. The sculptures are large androgynous heads or dismembered and kneeling bodies, populated by frogs, butterflies, snakes, worms, symbolic animals in the history of art. A way to conclude the exhibition with a mixture of mysticism and artistic and historical references.

The museum's chief curator, Mary-Dailey Desmarais, is very proud of this exhibition, which activates the MMFA's collection in an innovative way with the collaboration of

a major artist on the world art scene today. “Nicolas Party has the ability to transport us elsewhere with his immersive installations, but he also has a deep knowledge of art history,” she says. He appreciates our collection, with which he has worked with respect. Each choice of work was made with rigor. His exhibition is an invitation to ask questions.